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# CERAMICS

## DECORATIVE PLAQUES.



LAST month we gave, in connection with several illustrations of prize china paintings by amateurs who competed at the London exhibition, projected by Messrs. Howell & James, some description of the competition, condensed from a London journal.

Among the prize plaques named and not illustrated were Miss Emily L. Loch's "Horse-Chestnut Branch," the Magazine of Art prize; Miss E. E. Crombie's "Azaleas and Almond Blossom," the Princess Christian's prize; and Miss K. Kirkman's "Passion Flowers." We give illustrations of these on the opposite page. Facing them are two superb exhibition plaques from the famous factory of T. Deck, who, among other ceramic secrets, discovered that of gilding under the glaze. It is hardly fair, perhaps, to put the work of amateur English decorators in comparison with that of expert French masters of the art. But if the praises sounded by the London art critics be merited, these clever amateurs have no cause to be ashamed. One thing is certain—there is as good ceramic painting being done in England now as in any country in Europe. That at the factory of the Mintons is unsurpassed. When the English amateurs attain to the excellence of the artists there they may challenge comparison with the best in the world. It has been urged to the detraction of English national art merit that the principal decorators in the Minton factory are Frenchmen. That such admirable artists as Solon, of *pâte-sur-pâte* fame, and Mussel, the unsurpassed painter of plants and fishes, contribute greatly to the reputation of the house cannot be denied, but it is by no means true that all the best decorators are foreigners. Certainly some of the most beautiful work that comes to this country bears the stamp of English execution. Look in at the warerooms of Messrs. Davis Collamore & Co., in New York, where there is the best exhibit of Minton plaques yet seen in this country, and you will find that some of the best of the pieces, albeit somewhat Gallic in subject, bear the very British name of H. W. Foster. There is, or was, there one particularly finely painted plaque by that artist which our amateur china painters would do well to study. In color, composition, and general effect, it might serve as a model. Against a dead gold background (by the way, the Mintons are rivalling M. Deck in the production of metallic backgrounds) is a sweet-faced girl, with a soft white handkerchief about her throat, and a white mob cap, ornamented with stripes of blue, which are effectively repeated in her dress of Isabel color. Across the background is a green branch with red blossoms very decoratively introduced. The firing has been accomplished without a flaw: the flesh painting has lost none of its delicacy or transparency, and all the accessories of color have stood the fire test equally well. The plaque is the largest that we remember to have seen from the Minton factory, it being at least twenty inches in diameter.

The prize plaques at the Howell & James exhibition we hardly suppose equalled such work as this. But it is probable that the decorators of the English factories in the near future will be recruited from the ranks of such amateurs as engaged in this competition. We should like to believe that in our own country, out of our



EXHIBITION "DECK" PLAQUE.

vast army of students who are industriously spoiling good white porcelain, we shall ere long produce such a promising nucleus for a school of professional china painters as those who won the prizes in London. As it is, however, we are forced to admit that the number who develop any talent for this branch of decoration is



EXHIBITION "DECK" PLAQUE.

discouragingly out of proportion to the host which engages in its practice. The trouble is, we fear, that the seriousness of the work is not appreciated by either pupil or teacher.

## HINTS FOR CERAMIC DECORATION.

THOSE china painters to whom such costly works as Owen Jones's "Grammar of Ornament" and Racinet's "L'Ornement Polychrome" are not accessible will find the following hints of great value. We cull them from that excellent work, "Practical Ceramics for Students" (published by Henry Holt & Co., New York), by C. A. Janvier, who thus conveniently summarizes the opinions of some of the best modern authorities on the subject.

Charles Blanc makes the following remarks:

1. In ceramic art, as in all other arts, decoration should be subordinate to the form of the object decorated.

2. Perspective effects are out of place in the decoration of vases [or of any rounded surfaces].

3. Picture painting should not be imitated in vase painting, as this last, contrary to the rules of the former, delights especially in pure clear colors and unbroken tones.

4. Instead of the exact imitation of nature, ceramic decoration, even in the copying of natural objects, subordinates imitation to the laws of harmony and to the delight of the eye and of the mind.

5. Ceramic decoration, instead of striving after absolute unity of tone and the perfect evenness of surfaces [or color], should try to break these, either by vibration of color, or by one of the numerous means at the service of art, in order to bring play and, as it were, variety even into monochrome. [This is a most important rule for the decorator. In much

ware, here and in Europe, the decorator seems to endeavor to make the color as absolutely flat and even as possible, an effect easily obtained by powdered backgrounds. In the best Eastern and other work we see the surface, even of a plain color, broken up in some way; the color being often put on in several layers, or very slightly mottled or uneven. In other cases there is a slight pattern over it. Perfectly even and monotonous tones are to be avoided. At a distance the tone may look even, but a near approach should show a sort of shimmer or vibration which is a source of unending pleasure. The careful study of the petals of flowers will suggest much to an observant person; those apparently most even in tone will be found to possess this property.]

6. The rules of ceramic art vary according to the destination of the object decorated, ware for daily use not receiving the same decoration as wares for show and ornament. [In common household wares all useless knobs, excrescences or depressions should be avoided, as they break easily, or else catch the dirt, and, however pretty their effect may be, the good housekeeper soon learns to avoid them. Household ware must, above all, look clean. The color decoration of such ware had better be quietly gay. In wares for ceremonious or state occasions, the ceramist's fancy may have fuller play, but even then the destination of the plate or cup must be continuously borne in mind. Objects of pure ornament, to be placed on shelves or buffets,

will offer full scope to the ceramist, who nevertheless should still keep a tight rein on his fancy.]

7. When, as is necessarily the case in ornamental ceramics, the form of the vase is symmetrical, it is not



necessary that symmetry should be apparent in the decoration. [The Japanese are masters of what Blanc calls balanced confusion.]

8. The most beautiful color decoration of vases is by no means that which multiplies various tints, but rather that which, taking two complementary colors which mutually heighten each other, or two contrasting colors, tempers and harmonizes them by some intermediate accessory, and by less showy tones.

9. Although the imitation of gems, of beautiful stones, of bronzes, has produced both curious and interesting results, the ceramic decorator will do well to avoid all such counterfeiting and to rest content with the wide field offered by the resources peculiar to his art.

10. Ornament in high relief is unsuited to ceramic decoration.

The South Kensington rules are as follows :

1. The form should be most carefully adapted to use, being studied for elegance and beauty of line as well as for capacity, strength, mobility, etc.

2. In ornamenting the construction, care should be taken to preserve the general form, and to keep the decoration subservient to it by the low relief or otherwise; the ornament should be so arranged as to enhance, by its lines, the symmetry of the original form and assist its constructive strength.

3. If arabesques or figures in the round are used, they should arise out of the ornamental and constructive forms used and not be merely applied.

4. All projecting parts should have careful consideration, to render them as little liable to injury as is consistent with their purpose.

5. It must ever be remembered that repose is required to give value to ornament, which in itself is secondary, not principal.

Two other good precepts are :

1. Let every line of the design have meaning.

2. Use the fewest possible lines to convey the meaning.

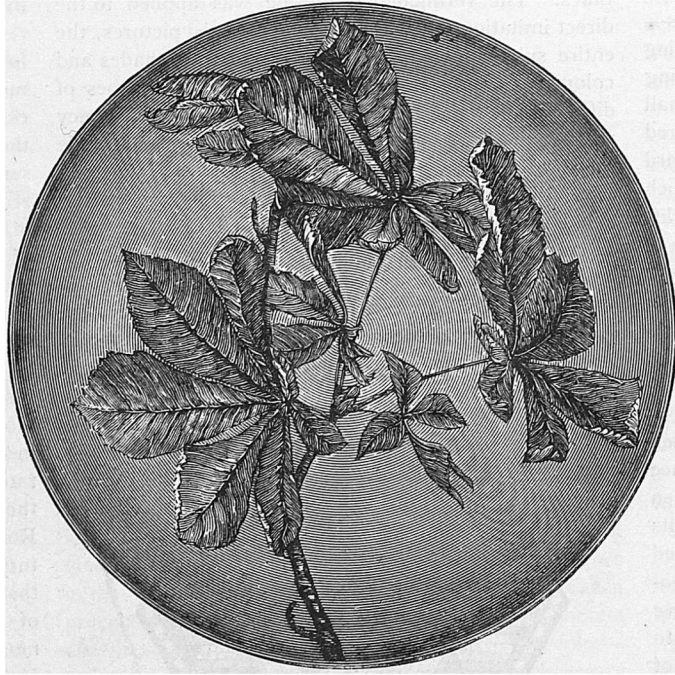
The following are the most useful rules given by Owen Jones for ceramic decoration :

*Rule 5.* Construction should be decorated. Decoration should never be purposely constructed.

*Rule 6.* Beauty of form is produced by lines growing out one from another in gradual undulations. There are no excrescences. Nothing could be removed and leave the design equally good or better.

be most beautiful which will be most difficult for the eye to detect. Thus the proportion of a double square, or 4 to 8, will be less beautiful than the more subtle ratio of 5 to 8, 3 to 6 than 3 to 7, 3 to 9 than 3 to 8, 3 to 4 than 3 to 5.

*Rule 11.* In surface decoration all lines should flow out of a parent stem. Every ornament, however distant, should be traced to its root and branch (Oriental practice). [This, which is excellent, only applies to certain classes of ornament.]



"THE MAGAZINE OF ART" AMATEUR PRIZE PLAQUE.

"HORSE-CHESTNUT BRANCH." BY MISS EMILY L. LOCH.

*Rule 12.* All junctions of curved lines with curved, or curved lines with straight, should be tangential to each other (natural law—Oriental practice in accordance with it). [This is a good and important rule, and means that such lines should sink gradually and imperceptibly into each other, and not as if they were abruptly crossing each other.]

*Rule 14.* Color is used to assist the development of form, and to distinguish objects or parts of objects from each other. [True generally, but in much fine ceramic work color is simply the delight of the eye, and means

nothing at all. Much beautiful Eastern work is of this nature, and delights us by its harmonious intermingling of rich hues.]

#### ARIZONA INDIAN POTTERY.

CINCINNATI is not the only place in the United States where a taste for pottery decoration prevails. In the distant territory of Arizona, among the Pueblo Indians, the ceramic art receives a surprising degree of attention. A correspondent of The Graphic gives some interesting information concerning a collection of Pueblo pottery, made by James Stevenson last summer, and now stored in the Smithsonian Institution at Washington. It includes over twenty-five hundred specimens, mainly the work of Zunis and Maquis, who, of

all the Indian tribes, have attained the highest perfection in the art of pottery. Some of these specimens are antique, but by far the greater number are such as the Pueblos are manufacturing at this day and have in constant use as household utensils. Many of them are fresh from the hands of the potter and have not been used at all. The necks are short, the middle part very bulging, and the bottoms flat. In only one specimen the neck is long. This is a water-jar shaped very much like a Roman vase. The neck is three times as long as the

neck of any other of the specimens. A good part of them are cast in the shapes of various animals, birds, and even men. Some of the plainer ones are almost identical in form with much of the pottery of the Indians of South America. The decorations are peculiar to those Indian tribes who have been brought into contact with the Spanish races.

Each tribe of the Pueblos appears to have some characteristic figure of decoration for nearly every piece of its pottery. Some of these decorations recur so

frequently that one is apt to suspect that they must have some significance. The Maquis place around the top of the inside of their vessels something like a double figure two repeated, without break in the line, a sufficient number of times to extend around the vessel. The Zunis make frequent use of the figure of some animal. Their favorites are the deer, the pig, the mule, and the elk. The deer occurs most frequently. Figures of birds, too, are of frequent occurrence in their work. Some of them are drawn with considerable skill and accuracy. Others are as stiff and awkward as the school-boy's picture of a horse. The feathers of the birds are in most instances cleverly done. A figure of two fighting cocks, for instance, would do no discredit to less rude artists. The serpent, so common in the artistic attempts of most Indian tribes, is not a favorite with the Pueblos. The figures of the animals are usually surrounded by nondescript decorations, which are neither flowers, vines, leaves, nor any natural objects, but which are nevertheless, many of them, very graceful. The Zunis are the only tribe of the Pueblos who habitually decorate with the figures of animals. This tribe is apparently the most expert in the manufacture of pottery. Their specimens are more shapely and the decorations, as a usual thing, better drawn.

The pieces are of all sizes, ranging from the massive jar, made for holding provisions, which measures twenty-eight inches across the mouth, down to the smallest drinking vessel, smaller than ordinary china teacups. The most common drinking-vessel is something very like our old-fashioned iron teakettle. Vessels for carrying water on journeys are jug-shaped, and usually not much decorated. The eating-bowls are round, with carved bottoms, similar to a Chinese rice-bowl. The rain-cups (small dishes about the size and shape of large coffee-saucers, used for carrying in the



AN AMATEUR PRIZE PLAQUE.

"PASSION FLOWERS." BY MISS KATE KIRKMAN.

*Rule 7.* The general forms being first cared for, these should be subdivided and ornamented by general lines; the interstices may then be filled in with ornament, which may again be subdivided and enriched for closer inspection.

*Rule 9.* As in every perfect work of architecture a true proportion will be found to reign between all the members which compose it, so, throughout the decorative arts, every assemblage of forms should be arranged in certain definite proportions. Those proportions will



AN AMATEUR PRIZE PLAQUE.

"AZALEAS AND ALMOND BLOSSOM." BY MISS E. E. CROMBIE.

hand in the dance for rain) are decorated with figures of frogs, tadpoles and lizards.

THE Belleek Pottery, Ireland, have published a new toilet service worth notice. It is Japanese in general style, fluted, and decorated with the Japanese thorn in bas-relief. The jug and basin are each provided with a set of three elongated low feet, covered with India-rubber so as to avoid noise.